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ABSTRACT

The development and implementation of a 6-month pilot electronic problem-solving network for principals is described. Twenty-four school leaders in Ontario and the Northwest Territories made up the membership of the network. Included in this report is information on user recruitment, operating procedures, technical arrangements, user perceptions of network utility, implementation obstacles, and development of a case problem file. Project results indicate that the role of the network broker is crucial for network operation and that FAX technology is the medium of choice for a network involving school principals. More significantly, it was determined that most principals' work patterns are generally incompatible with the requirements of membership in an electronic network. Recommendations are made for continuation of the network as an integrated part of a district staff development program. Appendices contain sample cases and correspondence. (17 references) (Author/LMI)

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PRINCIPALS' PROBLEM SOLVING NETWORK (PPSN):
Implementation Report On A Pilot Project

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Paper Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the
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Principals Problem-Solving Network (PPSN): Implementation Report On A Pilot Project

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Abstract:

This paper describes the development and implementation of a pilot electronic problem solving network for school principals. Twenty four school leaders in Ontario and the Northwest Territories made up the membership of the network. The six month project, initiated in January 1990, was intended to serve as the pilot for an expanded networking program planned for 1991. This paper reports on the recruitment of network users, the development of operating procedures, the various technical arrangements employed, user perceptions of the network's utility, the obstacles encountered during implementation, and the development of a case problem record file.

Results of the pilot project suggest that the role of the network broker is critical to the operation of the network and that FAX technology appears to be the media of choice for a network involving school principals. More significantly, it was determined that the established work patterns of most school principals are not particularly compatible with the requirements of membership in a electronic network. Recommendations for made for continuing the network as an integrated part of a district staff development program in two geographically distant school districts.

Principals Problem-Solving Network (PPSN)
Implementation Report On A Pilot Project

This project was conceived as an initial six month pilot for a much more ambitious communications network to be implemented in the future. The network was a collaborative project involving individuals from the OISE Centre for Leadership Development and the Northwest Territories Department of Education. It was conceived as a problem solving network whereby principals enrolled as users under a pseudonym, to protect anonymity, could seek the advice and support of colleagues in solving problems they encountered in their work. Both FAX and computer modem link-up technology were employed as alternate communications media. The sources of problem-solving expertise in this network were the network members themselves plus leadership centre personnel who were available for consultation. A key role was played in the networking exercise by the network broker who re-directed submitted problems to appropriate individuals, maintained a log of case problems and solutions, and generally managed the technical aspects of the network.

This paper begins with a brief outline of the rationale for a principals' problem-solving network. The conceptual underpinnings of the project are described as well as the specific objectives for the six month pilot exercise. This is followed by a review of the process employed in establishing the network and a description of the network procedures which were developed. Much of the actual documentation developed in support of the project has been appended to this paper. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and several recommendations for future projects of this nature.

Rationale for a Principals Problem-Solving Network:

The initial stimulus for the development of a Canadian principals' problem solving network came several years ago from one author's experiences as a member of a highly innovative, but shortlived, professional association established by Paula Silver (University of Illinois at Champaign) in 1984. Membership in this association, The Centre for Advancing Principalship Excellence (APEX), required member principals to write and send in for compilation an average of one case problem per month on a form provided by the APEX Center. In return member principals were to receive a monthly report on a topic of interest as well as access to other Center services (Silver, 1987). The project ended prematurely with the untimely death of Paula Silver. For the author, however, two nagging aspects of the experience survived and demanded resolution. One was the intense frustration regularly experienced by the member, a practicing elementary school principal, as he tried to make time and summon the motivation necessary to submit case problems to APEX. The other notion was the potentially high, but as yet unexplored, compatibility of new electronic communications technology with such a professional network.

More recent incentives for establishing a principals' problem-solving network were OISE experiences in pre-service preparation and in-service development programs for school leaders in the Northwest Territories (Begley and Cousins, 1990; Begley, Campbell Evans and Brownridge, 1990), and the interest expressed by members of the recently established Canadian Educational Leadership Network (CELN) in exploring the development of an electronic communications network to facilitate the sharing and dissemination of research findings (Leithwood and Begley, 1989). Our experiences with administrative problem-solving training in Ontario and the Northwest Territories (see Leithwood and Steinbach, 1990) suggested that many Canadian school leaders would welcome the opportunity to participate in such a network. Furthermore, in an

effort to better understand principal practices, attention within OISE Centre For Leadership Developement research programs has shifted increasingly to the causes of such practices and the internal mental processes which mediate potential influences in the external environment. Based on this research, school administrators' probelm-solving processes appear to be crucial to an understanding of why principals act as they do (Leithwood and Montgomery, 1986; Leithwood and Begley, 1986; Leithwood, 1988; Leithwood, Begley and Cousins, in press; Leithwood and Stager, 1989) .

A final incentive for the network is the increasing availability of new technology, such as FAX and computer/modem/mainframe systems, which have good potential for improving communications among principals (see Burger, 1989). FAX technology has in fact facilitated communications among a small group of OISE centre associates across Canada. In the Northwest Territories all principals (with the exception of one or two principals assigned to Western Arctic communities with only radio-telephone service) have for several years been networked on the INET system. Furthermore, since last year most NWT schools and communities have been equipped with FAX machines. On the Ontario scene, a very few schools are now equipped with FAX machines, and a somewhat larger number have access to modem equipped micro-computers.

Project Objectives: Objectives for the initial six month pilot project included the following:

1. To develop an initial network of 20 to 25 principals from Ontario and the Northwest Territories which might serve as the foundation for a much expanded program.

2. To establish and pilot general operating procedures for a problem-solving network which might include; membership registration forms, a problem submission format, network brokerage

and problem referral procedures, case problem record keeping procedures, and a resource catalogue of expert advisers.

3. To assess the relative merits and suitability of FAX versus computer/modem/main frame technology when utilized in a networking situation.

Establishing the Network:

The initial network involved 24 people. Paul Begley from the OISE Centre for Leadership Development and Peter Murray from the Northwest Territories Department of Education coordinated and managed the project. The remaining personnel were the actual network users; 11 principals from various regions of the Northwest Territories and 13 principals from various Southern Ontario school districts. Several of the Ontario principals in the network were "centre associates"; that is, practioners involved as intructional staff in the delivery of pre-service preparation and in-service development programs at OISE. One or two network members from the Northwest Territories were also centre associates while the rest were practitioners recruited from the various regions of the Canadian Arctic.

The network "users" actually provided the problem-solving expertise; the basic service offered by the network. A limited number of Centre or OISE faculty informally agreed to be available upon request by the "broker" to provide additional advice when necessary. These "experts" proved to be not needed during the six month pilot. Paul Begley acted as the network "broker" in that he received and redirected the various communications from network members. The network was monitored on a daily basis during the work week. The procedures were intended to minimize the time required of the broker. For example, FAX communications were simply redirected to the network members most likely to possess the required expertise. Where the VAX mainframe computer was

employed, the problem was posted by the problem submitter on a bulletin board account open to all members . Users of the computer modem / Vax system were free to respond to posted problems on their own, although the broker also had the option of informing selected members of newly posted problems relevant to their areas of expertise.

All network members from the Northwest Territories opted to use FAX technology as did 8 Ontario members. The remaining 5 network users from Ontario were to communicate via computer modem through the VAX mainframe at OISE. To facilitate this a number of VAX computer accounts were opened to accommodate the project. The network's operating centre was the OISE Centre for Leadership Development in Toronto. Four modem units and cables (approximately $150/unit) were purchased for the use of network members who had computers but lacked the phone link-up technology. The Centre for Leadership Development MacIntosh computer network is already linked to the OISE Vax minicomputers. The "Mail" function on a special Vax user account assigned to all network members was employed as a "bulletin board" for posting problems. Fax communications were received and sent by personnel in the OISE FAX centre. The OISE "FAX tax" on all messages received and sent was borne by the Centre. Other associated costs covered by the Centre were CPU time charges, Datapac charges, long distance FAX charges, as well as the cost of general office supplies.

Each individual recruited by Begley or Murray agreed to participate in the network using a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. For the most part, members of the network did not come to know each other's identity and, in any event, communicated through the network only by pseudonym. The broker noted that from time to time network users responded to a request for advice from a colleague without realizing that the individual with the problem was an acquaintance. A confidential membership list was maintained which matched up pseudonyms with actual identities in case direct contact was necessary with a network user. Candidates

appeared to enjoy selecting their own "handles". Personnel in the OISE FAX office, for their part, were initially puzzled, but in time regularly amused, by receipt of communications from the like of "Whiskeyjack", "Hoss", "Snow Bunny" and "Winter Heat".

Shortly after being registered in the network, each member received an information package by FAX or mail. This package included a covering letter welcoming them to the network, a copy of their membership registration form, a suggested format for case problem submission, and a set of detailed procedures for using the network with either a FAX machine or computer modem. These materials were developed and distributed by the broker. (see appended copies)

The suggested case problem reporting format (copy appended) was based on case analysis criteria developed by the now defunct APEX organization discussed earlier (Silver, 1987). It was intended as a guide to facilitate description of the case problem rather than a rigid format requirement. Network members responding to submitted case problems were free to use whatever format they wished. Most, in fact, employed a memo format (see appended examples). The broker used a large three ring binder to keep network related documentation organized. Such documentation included; membership information, written communications from members, in addition to copies of the submitted case problems and the solutions or advice offered by members.

The network was technically operational during January 1990. However, the small number of case problems and responses which were actually catalogued did not begin to accumulate until mid April. The pilot project ended officially in June 1990 with the preparation of this report, although network users may in fact continue to communicate for the foreseeable future. The Vax accounts are still active and the network broker is still available to process submitted problems and responses.

Results and Discussion:

1. Development of a Principals' Problem Solving Network:

In many respects a network of principals and academics who are OISE Centre associates existed prior to the implementation of this project. For example, Principals from the Northwest Territories have quite regularly communicated by FAX with Centre for Leadership Development personnel regarding their practicum projects and other matters related to the OISE developed principal certification program. Similarly, OISE Field Centre faculty are regular users of the VAX Mail system; often from their own residences. The innovation with the Principals' Problem-Solving Network was the notion of adding a confidential peer operated problem-solving service to an expanded membership of practitioners who were also Centre associates.

Begley and Murray had very little trouble recruiting individuals who were keen to become network members. Most individuals who were approached responded with high enthusiasm. The result was that within a matter of about three weeks a membership of 24 members was assembled. Once registered, those members who were FAX users encountered very little in the way of technical obstacles to impede their participation. The modem users were another situation entirely. Their technical tribulations will be discussed in a later section.

Although generating network membership proved to be a straight forward task, stimulating use of the network by members for problem-solving purposes was considerably more challenging. While members reponded promptly to requests for problem-solving advice in response to a request directed to them by the broker, the network users did not submit problems for solving to the network. In an effort to stimulate network activity, the broker was ultimately reduced to calling members by telephone to solicit problems for posting.

Further questioning of members by the broker revealed that the obstacle preventing active and independent use of the network was the time required to write up a problem description for submission. Network users readily admitted to having problems which they they said they were not reluctant to share. Several indicated they needed and welcomed the receipt of any advice which might help them solve these problems. Yet they reported difficulty finding the time to write up the problem description which would secure that needed advice.

The pattern of frustration encountered by members of the APEX association in 1986 seems to have been repeated in the PPSN pilot project. The typical daily work patterns of principals do not seem very compatible with participation in an electronic communications network. This suggests that if reflective problem-solving, with and for others, is to become a part of a principal's routine, a change in the work culture will be required. Just as teachers interested in child-centred education must learn to break the traditional patterns of classroom isolation, principals may have to get used to communicating more regularly with each other; electronically or otherwise. The objective of such activity is not the successful implementation of a networking project. The really worthwhile objectives are collaborative peer support in dealing with school leadership problems, and the refinement of problem-solving skills through conscious reflective practice.

In many respects our experiences parallel classic planned change research findings (eg. Fullan, 1982; Huberman & Miles, 1984) where an innovation may be intrinsically worthwhile and welcomed by the potential users, but remain under-utilized because its use does not mesh with the existing culture of the organization.

2. Establishing General Network Operating Procedures:

One of the positive outcomes of the pilot project was the development of procedures for setting up and operating an electronic problem-solving network. The procedures developed in support of this project are appended to this paper. They are self explanatory for the most part and may serve well as a suggested format for others attempting to organize their own network.

One question which arises from our experiences relates to the use of a standard reporting format for problem submission. The use of a standard format at the project development stage was justified by two considerations: the desire to foster systematic problem analysis skills in the network members, and the appeal of developing a library of problems analyzed according to uniform criteria with multiple solutions accompanying. Unfortunately, the imposition of a set format for problem solution may have stifled more spontaneous use of the network by members because of the time required to prepare a written problem analysis using fixed categories.

Another outcome of our experiences with the operating procedures used in the pilot program was confirmation that the role of the broker is critical to the success of the network. In addition to day to day management of the operation and the re-direction of submitted problems to appropriate solvers, members seem to value the broker's personifying role in the network. When questions arise, there is a real person to communicate with that is not camouflaged by a pseudonym. This suggests that ideally the broker should meet each member face to face at some time to counter the depersonalizing effects of the technology.

Operating costs were not a significant factor in the operation of a pilot project for six months and of secondary importance to the stated objectives. No effort was made to keep records of the costs associated with OISE computer CPU time, Fax charges, or clerical supplies. The one large expense was the purchase of four computer modems by the Centre for several network users who intended to link up with the OISE Vax computer via a micro-computer. The

broker's time was contributed gratis. Should this network be continued, or another one established elsewhere, some sort of annual membership fee would have to be levied in order to recover costs.

3. Suitability of FAX versus Micro-computer Technology:

The findings here were quite obvious. Virtually all communications received from members in the network were by FAX. By June it became apparent that for school administrators the technology with the best compatibility with their work patterns was the FAX. In contrast the computer/ modem option floundered from the beginning for the five network members who intended to use it. Despite concerted efforts on the part of these five individuals, and support from both their school district computer consultants and the network broker, a variety of technical problems conspired to block their use of the network. In two cases even when the technical problems were finally solved, the users still did not use their modem system to communicate with the network. Ironically, these same two members continued to communicate regularly with the Centre by telephone on a multitude of other matters, but not to submit problems or respond to problems posted on the computer bulletin board account.

In the university setting it is commonplace for individuals to log on and communicate with a main frame computer system via a micro-computer and modem. The situation for the principals in the network was apparently not as workable. Although Centre staff arranged the required accounts for the five members and the network was fully operational on the OISE end, a series of technical problems at the local level frustrated efforts. In one case the member's phone line (in a rural area) was a party line which prevented a modem from being used reliably. For two members it took several months just to locate the source for a proper cable to connect a standard modem to their computer. Given enough time all these problems could have been resolved, but it is unclear if the the members would have felt comfortable enough with the technology

by then to use the network for something as personal as problem-solving.

FAX technology, in contrast, seemed much more compatible with the members' well ingrained paper handling habits. This appears to be an innovation which has a good fit with the traditional school environment. The broker also found that Fax communications were easiest to copy for recording keeping purposes and easy to re-direct to other network members.

If the Centre's network is to be continued or expanded in the future, it is our intention to adopt FAX technology as the media of choice.

Conclusion:

Perhaps the most valued outcome of this project was the collaboration which occured between two member organizations of the Canadian Educational Leadership Network (CELN); OISE and the Northwest Territories Department of Education. Particularly since this pilot project was partially in response to one of the original stated objectives for the establishment of CELN; regular dissemination and exchange of information among members.

Another positive outcome was the development of prototypical procedures for the operation of a principals' electronic communications network focussed on problem-solving. Perhaps the materials appended to this paper will encourage others to consider implementing their own networks.

While a national communications network operated by CELN might contribute significantly to the development of effective administrators in Canada, it is apparent that several technical and school culture related obstacles would frustrate the coordination of such a project beyond the regional level at this time. A more modest next step in an evolution from the initial pilot project might

be to use a FAX communications network as one component of a long term professional development project involving multiple Canadian school districts.

Plans are being made at this time for just such a project involving a Southern Ontario school district and a Northwest Territories school region. The proposed strategy is to incorporate a problem-solving network as part of a multi-year professional development project aimed at improving principals' problem-solving skills and encouraging more collaboration among principals that work in the same school district. Should these plans come to fruition we will endeavour to report on our experiences through CELN and at future sessons of the annual CASEA conference.

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January 15, 1990

<<name>>
<<title>>
<<school>>
<<street address>>
<<town & province>>
<<postal code>>
<<Telephone>>
<<FAX#>>

Dear <<Name>>:

Thank you for your interest in participating in the Principals' Problem Solving Network (PPSN). With this letter I wish to confirm your membership in the network and provide you with the information which will allow you to immediately begin using this collegial problem-solving service. Please find attached the following materials intended to facilitate your use of the network:

1. A short description of PPSN outlining its objectives and terms of reference.

2. A list of procedures for communicating with the PPSN using (a) FAX technology or (b) personal computer/modem/OISE Vax mainframe interface.

3. A suggested format for describing problems to be submitted to the PPSN.

4. A copy (for your records) of the registration form we have on file confirming your address, telephone number, FAX number and the PPSN "handle" or pseudonym you have selected for yourself. This form may also list areas of special expertise.

Paul Begley will serve as "broker" for the network. He may communicate directly with you from time to time to seek your advice or to direct your attention to a particular problem submitted by a colleague. To date twenty four individuals have registered as users of the PPSN pilot project. Eleven members are school administrators from the Northwest Territories. The balance are school administrators from Ontario. The "network broker" also has access to a few "experts" at OISE should their input occasionally be required. If you have questions or require further information about PPSN contact Paul Begley at the Centre for Principal Development by telephone, FAX or electronic mail on the OISE Vax computer. See your procedures page for computer account names and FAX numbers.

Yours sincerely,

PPSN MEMBERSHIP RECORD FORM

Name:

Title:

Address:

Telephone:

PPSN MEDIA: **FAX**___ **MODEM**____

Pseudonym:

Areas of Interest or Expertise:

Date of Enrollment:

SUGGESTED CASE PROBLEM REPORTING FORMAT*

Case Title:_____

Date:_____

Your Pseudonym: _____

Your FAX Number: (if applicable) _____

Trigger Event(s):

Nature of the Problem:

Goals/Objectives of Your Actions in Response:

Possible Causes:
-self initiated
-school based
-external influences

Additional Information:
-key events
-important contextual information
-target dates for solution
-further reflections

Proposed Action/Solution

* This reporting format is loosely based on the APEX case form produced by Paula Silvers, University of Illinois-Urbana (1985).

PPSN: January 1990

PPSN Operating Procedures
(January 1990)

FAX Users:

a) How to Submit a Problem to PPSN by FAX:

- Prepare a description of the problem using the suggested case problem format provided for your convenience.
- Be sure to use your pseudonym, not your real name. Do not reveal the identity of individuals described in your problem. Also guard against providing identifying details of context in your problem description. Change names etc.
- FAX your problem description to Paul Begley or John Kearns (the network brokers) at OISE **FAX #(416) 926-4725.**
- The brokers will re-transmit your submitted problem within two business days to an appropriate adviser (usually a member of PPSN) for consideration.
- Any responses or reactions to the submitted problem will be forwarded to you by the brokers unless you have requested direct communications with an adviser (this action would necessitate revealing your identity).
- The brokers will retain a copy of your submitted problem and any proferred advice. These will be collected as a PPSN portfolio of case problems.

b) How to Offer Advice or React to a FAXed Problem:

- If you are sent a case problem and wish to respond by FAX, be sure to include the following in your response: the case title and the submitter's pseudonym, your pseudonym, your reactions or advice.
- Send your response to the brokers at OISE (Paul Begley or John Kearns). **FAX #(416) 926-4725.**
- The brokers will then re-transmit your message to the person that submitted the problem.

c) How to Contact PPSN Administrators for Information:

- If you have questions or wish to offer opinions on the operation of PPSN, please communicate directly with Paul Begley by telephone (416) 923-6641 or FAX (416) 926-4725.

Case Title: A Question of Seniority

Date: April 6, 1990

Pseudonym: Hoss

FAX Number for Response: (416) 926-4725

Trigger Event: Student numbers at our small elementary school (staff of six, 120 students JK-8) have increased to the point where Kindergarten students will have a separate class for the first time ever starting in September. Up until now we have by necessity operated a combined Kindergarten/grades 1&2 class. Kindergarten operates only half day in the AM which leaves a reduced class of grade 1 & 2 students (15-17) in the PM. The same teacher has taught this combination for over 16 years. This is my fourth year as a teaching-principal of this school.

Nature of the Problem: Since becoming principal of this school I have urged the Primary class teacher to consider a change of grade responsibility. Sixteen years is a long time. Her performance is competent but traditional. She is not an innovator by inclination or performance. On the other hand, her qualifications as a Primary Specialist, her "time in ranks", and the unattractiveness of a triple split grade class have combined to make it easy for her to remain the Primary teacher, until now.

Another teacher on staff (younger, enthusiastic & innovative) has requested a Primary placement when "one becomes available". She has been at the school four years, has taught Junior, Intermediate and Special Education. I am very impressed with this teacher's instructional skills and she is major contributor to school affairs. The older veteran teacher frequently shows signs of resenting this young enthusiastic upstart. I would like to appoint the younger teacher to the new Kindergarten class for September. I have not announced this plan yet, but she would teach Kindergarten in the AM and handle Special Needs programs in the empty classroom during the PM. The veteran teacher would continue to teach Grades 1 & 2 only.

However, the veteran teacher has come up with a more complicated plan whereby she would teach Kindergarten and grade 1 in the morning. The other teacher would be left with a Grades 2, 3 and 4 in the morning. Then in the afternoon grade 2 would change

rooms and teachers to join grade 1 in the veteran's class, leaving grades 3 and 4 where they were.

Goals/Objectives of My Proposed Actions: I don't like moving around Primary kids at the best of times. I believe their interests are best met by having a single teacher, not a "rotary system". I also would like to force a change of teaching assignment for the veteran teacher, away from her traditional Kindergarten, Grades 1 and 2 split. Furthermore, I would like to honour the younger teacher's legitimate and deserved request for early Primary experience. Finally, I suspect that the veteran's plan is motivated at least partially by a desire to keep the other teacher in her place.

Additional Information: Last year when I approached the Superintendent to secure his support for a forced change of grade responsibility for the veteran teacher, he advised me not to force the issue. He felt the potential for bad feelings and reduced staff morale were not justified.

Action/Solution to Date: The veteran teacher met with me after school one day last week to outline her plan. I listened to her carefully and asked a few questions about the need to move the students around. I told her I would think about her plan, but that my initial reaction was not positive because of the rotary component of the plan. She seemed a little disappointed. Her response was to remind me of her seniority. Clearly she believes I should make my placement decision according to her personal plan because of her seniority. Later, another teacher reported to me that the veteran teacher had announced to the staff that our meeting had not gone well and that I had been very uncooperative with her. I am inclined to stick to my guns, but I am also worried about creating a lot of bad feelings on staff.

Case Title: Racism Complaint

Date: March 30, 1990

Pseudonym: Whiskeyjack

Your FAX Number: (if applicable) 416-926-4725

Trigger Event(s): A teacher on my staff (I am the principal) was absent from work last Friday. I know she was not ill on that day. She was attending a one day conference in other community. Because she did not have leave of absence for the day, I informed her on the following Monday when she returned to school that she would be docked a day's pay for her absence. She became very incensed with my action and suggested that I was discriminating against her on racial grounds, and that I had previously granted leave to another teacher. She has threatened to report me to the Race Relations Commission.

Nature of the Problem: About six weeks ago, a teacher on my staff, who is a member of a visible minority group, orally requested a day's leave of absence to attend a conference on racial discrimination in education. I told her that I could not grant leaves, that such requests had to be processed through the Superintendent. I also told her that she could not be away that day because an important staff meeting relating to Special Needs was scheduled for that day.

At the end of the afternoon on the day prior to the conference, I discovered a letter in my mail slot from the same teacher requesting leave to attend the conference the next day. That evening I tried to reach her by telephone but she was "unavailable". I left a message with her husband stating that I could not approve her leave for the next day.

Goals/Objectives of Your Actions in Response: I am convinced that I did the right thing in reporting her absent without leave. However,

I am not keen to fight a racism charge. Race relations are tense at this time in my community. My Director will not welcome a scandal.

My objective is to do all the right things to diffuse this potentially volatile situation and clearly communicate that this situation has no racial overtones. It doesn't! She was away without permission and I am not a rascist.

Possible Causes:

This teacher and I have had previous differences of opinion. I find her very confrontational and egocentric in manner.

Our school system has assigned considerable importance to racial issues of late.

Additional Information:

Another teacher on staff, white male, was given permission by me to be absent for half a day to give a workshop at another school several months ago. Because it was only a part day and I covered his class, I did not request the superintendent's approval first, nor did I list him as absent for the half day on the monthly report. While there is no official policy on this type of absence, other principals have routinely permitted similar absences without reporting them or docking pay.

This week a third teacher submitted a letter to me (copied to the superintendent) requesting leave for a day to attend a writing workshop at the local high school. That date is a professional development day for the high school, but not for the elementary school.

Proposed Action/Solution

I have provided the teacher with a written denial to her written request for leave (dated the day of her absence). Copies have been sent to the superintendent. I have also discussed the matter with the superintendent. He agrees that I did the right thing and says he will support me. However, he does not want a scandal. While I appreciate his verbally expressed support, I still feel vulnerable to being charged as a rascist. If she does file a complaint, I think I may need a lawyer. Any good advice out there?